

Public Question Time

Question submitted by Angelika (Geli) Harris

As you will be aware my husband and I have been for some time asking questions at the Broads Authority meetings to highlight the concerns that we have formed from our experience at Catfield about the deficiencies of the statutory bodies in fulfilling their legal obligation to safeguard our finest wetland sites which, like Catfield, are subject to the highest level of environmental legal protection. At the last meeting the Chairman “emphasised that the Authority recognised the deficiencies.” Since then there have been two developments on the Catfield case-Natural England has made their final submission to the Environment Agency on the scientific evidence which now fully echoes the scientific analysis that our independent experts have been making for a long time and secondly the Environment Agency has once again deferred its final decision despite a process which has now lasted almost seven years.

This experience and these deficiencies are relevant to the question I would ask today as they relate to how far the Authority itself is in practise either committed to or effective in managing its own conservation objectives. Frankly my husband and I were shocked by both the tone and content of what we heard here two months ago in your rebranding discussion. In essence the Executive, in order to get its touristic objective of rebranding passed and to resolve what was described but not minuted as a “credibility issue” made concessions on conservation to the vociferous boating lobby in particular to drop its planned ambition of ever becoming a legal national park and also to refute as far as the Broads were concerned the Sandford principle which is the distinguishing feature of a real national park as the National Parks’ website makes quite clear and I quote “When the aims and purpose conflict with each other, then the Sandford principle should be used to give more weight to conservation of the environment.”

My question is simple – How can it be either morally or legally either proper or correct for the Broads Authority to represent itself as a national park when it has just dropped the ambition of ever becoming one legally and specifically denied the primacy of conservation which is the key feature of a real national park? Is it not a “falsehood” as one of your members accurately described it to pretend otherwise and a “falsehood” to which all members risk being party?

The Authority’s response will be reported at the meeting and read out by the Chairman.